

Creating Unity in Paragraphs

Each paragraph you write should have **unity**. In other words, it should have a single focus, or main idea. When revising your paragraphs, be sure to look for a **topic sentence**, a statement of the main idea that often occurs at the beginning of a paragraph, as well as **supporting details**, sentences that clearly contribute to the main idea. In addition, watch out for paragraphs that discuss more than one main idea. If you notice a paragraph veering off onto a slightly different topic, you have probably found a good place to split the paragraph in two.

In the following example, notice how the sentences following the topic sentence at the beginning of the paragraph support the main idea.

Gertrude Stein once told the young writer Ernest Hemingway, "You are all a lost generation," and the term *lost generation* has been used again and again to describe the people of the post-World War I years. It describes those Americans, including Hemingway, who settled in Paris after the war because they were disillusioned with their home country. It also describes those who returned to the United States with an intense awareness of living in an unfamiliar, changing world.

EXERCISE A For each paragraph below, delete any sentence that does not support the main idea by drawing a line through it.

1. To see a rainbow, go outside when rain is falling but the sun is shining. Stand with your back to the sun. Your chances of spotting a rainbow are better in early morning or late afternoon, when the sun is low in the sky. Which time of day are you more alert? You're looking for sunlight refracted in and reflected off raindrops.
2. Ana de Osorio, the countess of Chinchon in Spain, moved to Peru with her husband in 1630. The people of Peru speak Spanish. While there, they both caught malaria. They were dosed with tree bark containing quinine, now known to cure malaria. When they returned home in 1638, the countess took some of the bark with her. They arrived to find Spain in the grip of a malaria epidemic. Ana gave the bark to her sick friends, ending the epidemic and saving many lives.
3. Nineteenth-century Americans went through wood at an alarming pace. They used it to build railroad ties, telegraph poles, bridges, and carriages. For example, ten miles of track were laid every day, which took about two thousand trees. They also burned it in quantity. Their fireplaces were very cozy. The railroads burned three thousand cords of wood for fuel every month.
4. In early nineteenth-century England, letter carriers had to collect payment from senders as they delivered the mail. This process really slowed them down. They didn't have a Pony Express. A man named Rowland Hill suggested prepaid delivery. In January 1840, the first letters carrying postage stamps were delivered. The stamps cost a penny apiece.
5. Anne Whitney was an American sculptor who lived from 1821 to 1915. She used her art to express her opinions on social issues, such as women's rights and the abolition of slavery. Slavery is a moral outrage. For example, to express her sympathies for the impoverished peasants of Rome, she made a statue that showed the goddess of Rome looking old, depressed, and weary.

Revising with Style**LESSON****27**
Continued

EXERCISE B Revise the following passage for better unity and focus by dividing it into paragraphs. Insert a paragraph symbol (§) wherever a new paragraph should begin.

Teens recognize that the Internet has some problems. One of the biggest is the digital divide—the gap between people who have access to the Web and those who do not. At the moment, fewer than half of all teens have access from home. Many teens are optimistic about this issue, though. They point out that computers are becoming less expensive and many Internet service providers are free. These teens hope that one day soon, everyone will have access to the Internet, no matter what their income. The Internet has other problems. Some teens say they are worried about computer fraud and criminal hacking. Others are concerned about the possibility of Internet addiction. In one survey, twenty-eight percent of teen respondents said they spend more than twenty hours per week online (compared with sixteen percent of adult respondents). Still other teens fear that people will stop interacting in person. “The advances of the computer have already begun to create a more impersonal society,” says fifteen-year-old Amanda Cannata. However, for most teens, the attitude seems to be full speed ahead. “Teens are most open to the possibilities of the Web,” concludes author Mimi Mandel. “It’s second nature to them, like television is to my generation.”